

# *Sketch*

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## Faith

Joyce Siegmund\*

\*Iowa State University

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# Faith

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## **Abstract**

"Doctor Bouza? May I drop in at your office for a few minutes? Right-away-thank you. I'll come right over."...

# Faith

“**D**OCTOR BOUZA? May I drop in at your office for a few minutes? Right away—thank you. I’ll come right over.”

I hang up the phone, stopping a moment to listen to the harsh, rasping sound of my mother’s irregular breathing coming from the bedroom—a habit I’d formed the last few days. I slide into my coat and button it hastily.

As I step out the door and close it on the heavy, pain-filled respirations, my whole being aches. It is a chore to walk, and inside me, instead of active organs, there seems to be nothing but emptiness. My throat and head are clogged till I think they will burst with the futility of it all.

I try to look at my mother’s sickness objectively as I plod along bleak gray streets, ugly with the frost still making things stiff and unyielding. It is probably just my imagination thinking that Mother’s gasps for breath are getting a little farther apart all the time. And it is only natural that she would be a little less interested in how we are doing the housework and how Congress is acting, when she has been confined to her bedroom for a couple of weeks. Her voice wasn’t really any weaker, and she did still try to joke when we had to bathe her.

Yet I had to be assured by someone else. I had to know if there wasn’t something we could give Mother to ease the pain or give her some relief in her constant struggle for air. I push myself faster toward the doctor’s office.

I am told by his calm, efficient receptionist that the doctor has been called out on an emergency. I can come back in a half hour. The unemotional poise of the girl irritates me. Has she never suffered?

But my father has given me some errands to do downtown. I must keep busy. So I check his list and start down main street toward the grocery store. In front of the Old Log Bar lolls Charlie Marshall, the town drunkard. He is as black, dirty and foul-smelling as ever this morning. His beard is long and crusted with bits of dirt and matter. His face and eyes are brilliant against his sloven faded overalls and his grimy shirt.

"Ish' your mama up and kickin' yet, little girl?" he asks me as I hurry past. I shudder. The foul old beast! For seventy years he's lived . . . without proper food and rest, without education, without love, without shelter and security. No one needed him. His life cycle was bars, liquor, and profanity. Yet he was in the best of health.

But I must not permit myself to think things like this. Faith. Faith. My eyes turn back toward the doctor's office. His car is not there yet. I hurry on.

I am gathering up my groceries when Dora Hay looms up beside me. The dyed orangey tint she has given her hair looks clownish beside the black mascaraed eyebrows and heavily rouged lips of a purplish shade. I try to move away from that bulky frame of hers in which so many men find delight. The cheap suit pulled tight across hips and bosom! The mixed stench of stale smoke and dime store perfume! She's telling me about the carnival she and some of her "boyfriends" are attending this afternoon. I feel nauseated. Dora is older than my mother, unmarried.

People often wonder why Dora has never picked up a disease. "She's just lucky," they all say, but I can't understand. It's the same old question grinding in my brain again. We are taught that on Salvation Day we will learn the purpose for God's every move. Death I can grasp. But this unbearable suffering! Why? Why my mother, who has broken none of the laws of Christianity?

"The doctor will probably give me encouragement," I tell myself as I near his office. "Mother will get well and be happy her remaining years. There is a reason for everything."

The receptionist meets me at the glass door as I pull on its handle. Could it be that her flat face shows a bit of sympathy and sweetness as she stands looking at me for a moment? Then her mouth opens and her words fall, as though from far away, "Your father just called, Jean. Your mother has passed way. He said to tell you she is resting peacefully now . . ."

Mechanically I say, "Thank you," and back out the door. The sky is cloudy, and the wind wails through the branches over my head. A gray meadowlark—Mother's favorite bird—sings with pride at new gaping-mouthed offspring . . .

—Joyce Siegmund, T & C, Sr.